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SUBJECT: SEPTEMBER 30 MCNS CONSIDERS BASRAH COMMANDER
OPTIONS, DISPLACED PERSONS RETURN, AND DETAINEE RIGHTS

REF: BAGHDAD 3264

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: The September 30 Ministerial Council on National Security was dominated by discussion on the future of the Basrah military commander, General Mohan, who was appointed to a three-month term. Many Iraqi government ministers, the U.S. and UK Ambassadors, and MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus urged Prime Minister Maliki to extend Mohan,s term by at least another three months. PM Maliki approved the extension but asked for an inquiry into the allegation that Mohan had returned seized Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) weapons to their owners. Maliki also ordered assignment of additional police intelligence personnel to find the killers of the aides to Grand Ayatollah Sistani, and requested that Iraqi intelligence services develop metrics to monitor Basrah security with regular updates to the MCNS starting next week. In light of the improving security situation, PM Maliki directed the National Security Advisor to form a permanent committee within the Baghdad Operations Center that would address problems of displaced persons returning to Iraq. General Petraeus expressed concern that more than half of the 6,000 detainees in Iraqi custody had been held for greater than a year and several hundred have been held without trial since 2003. PM Maliki agreed to look into the situation and responded that the Iraqi government had released 4,700 detainees and more releases would be possible. PM Maliki closed the meeting by asking for information about security issues related to the rebuilding of the Golden Dome Mosque in Samarra. Minister of Defense Abdel Qadr briefed him on the measures taken to keep the city and mosque secure. END SUMMARY.

Can Military Commander Tame Basrah in Three Months?

¶2. (S) Although intended as affirmation of support for his Basrah Military Commander, Prime Minister al-Maliki,s decision to extend General Mohan,s command beyond the originally planned three months set off verbal fireworks at the September 30th Ministerial Council on National Security (MNCS). Minister of Defense (MOD) Abdel Qadr told PM Maliki that he strongly backed Mohan,s military leadership, citing numerous examples of decreasing violence in Basrah, but said he needed his four-star general elsewhere. The Deputy Minister of Justice did not dispute Mohan,s military ability, but he vigorously countered MOD Abdel Qadr,s optimistic assessment of Basrah security as well as Mohan,s efforts to curb violence. He claimed that General Mohan feared the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia and had succumbed to

pressure to return their seized weapons. Minister of State for National Security (MSNS) al-Waeli defended Mohan, pointing out that his requested military forces were not yet fully deployed, so his fear of JAM was understandable. But al-Waeli turned his wrath on the Basrah Chief of Police Jalil, calling him a weak and ineffective leader who did not work well with people.

13. (S) Prime Minister Maliki expressed surprise at the ministers, sharp reaction, especially to his approval of Mohan,s extension, which had been tentatively agreed at the September 25th MCNS. (Note: at that MCNS, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih recommended approval of the extension per reftel. End note.) Maliki admitted concern about the allegation that Mohan had returned seized JAM weapons, but demanded that the Acting Minister of Justice produce a credible witness. Until such time, PM Maliki said he intended to approve the extension. He added that he was willing to go to Basrah himself to find out the truth, if necessary.

14. (S) MOD Abdel Qadr and MOI al-Bowani both cautioned the Prime Minister against listening to the Basrah parliamentarians on this issue. Their complaints, said the two ministers, almost certainly stemmed from the decision by Gen. Mohan and Chief of Police Jalil to pull 300 police from the parliamentary Personal Security Details (PSD). PM Maliki answered that he rarely took politicians, statements at face value; nonetheless, there was probably some element of truth to their complaints and he had a duty to listen.

15. (S) UK Ambassador Prentice said that the UK Consul General and Commanding General in Basrah had full confidence in both General Mohan and Chief of Police Jalil. He pointed out that

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the two had seized the initiative in Basrah and were squeezing the militias hard. He agreed that complaints against Mohan and Jalil were politically motivated by people who benefited from likely nefarious militia activity. He concluded that it was the responsibility of these political elites to quit complaining and support PM Maliki,s efforts at reducing violence and developing reconciliation.

16. (S) MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus said he believed Basrah security had improved under Gen. Mohan. He challenged the Iraqi intelligence services to develop their own security metrics and monitor the results. It was important to get a base-level measurement of the violence now, he said, because Gen. Mohan,s forces were getting stronger each day; he had under his control two special operations companies, a large mechanized battalion including a tank company, two National Police battalions, and a complete brigade that recently swapped-out with its predecessor.

17. (S) In the end, PM Maliki approved the additional three-month extension to Gen. Mohan,s command (subject to close monitoring of the security situation by the MCNS), asked for an inquiry into the allegation that Mohan had returned seized weapons, ordered assignment of additional police intelligence personnel to find the killers of the aides to Grand Ayatollah Sistani (Note: two were killed last week in separate incidents, one in Basrah. End note.), and requested that Iraqi intelligence services develop metrics to monitor Basrah security with regular updates to the MCNS starting next week.

Return of Displaced Iraqi Citizens

18. (S) In response to the improving situation in Baghdad and other parts of the country, PM Maliki asked the MCNS to address the return of displaced Iraqi citizens both inside and outside the country. In particular, he wanted to hear their opinion about obstacles for a smooth transition.

¶9. (S) Deputy National Security Advisor presented a graph showing the estimated number of displaced families. He said the most critical issue was housing, especially those that had been abandoned for security concerns or outright coercion, but subsequently re-occupied by other families. This issue, he said, demanded a careful and deliberate solution.

¶10. (S) Minister of the Interior al-Bowani added that the government should focus its attention on Baghdad, which had the most serious issues. Besides housing, the government also needed to address citizen services like understaffed schools and medical facilities. He also expressed concern about security for families during their return from Jordan and Syria; he specifically requested MNF-I assistance in securing transit routes.

¶11. (S) MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus cautioned the MCNS about the enormous coordination required to smoothly execute such a comprehensive plan. He compared it to a chess game where every single move needed to be planned well in advance before the first piece was even touched. In this case, he said, families couldn't be moved back into houses without considering the effect on current occupants. He offered MNF-I assistance with security, but reminded the MCNS that return of displaced persons was an Iraqi issue that needed Iraqi solutions.

¶12. (S) Ambassador Crocker added that the success of the Baghdad Security Plan actually presented a huge challenge to Iraqi civilian agencies. Now that security conditions had improved and allowed displaced families to return, it was their job to develop and execute comprehensive plans to undo militia control of property and services. Further, they needed to address these issues not only for returning displaced persons but for every Iraqi citizen.

¶13. (S) PM Maliki closed the discussion by directing the National Security Advisor to form a permanent committee within the Baghdad Operations Center that would specifically address this problem. He asked the NSA to work out the details and brief the MCNS next week.

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Iraqi Detainees

¶14. (S) General Petraeus commended PM Maliki for his signing of the September 20 executive order on detainee rights. He suggested that the Iraqi government follow this important order with an investment in judicial assets, particular additional judges and investigators. General Petraeus expressed concern more than half of the 6,000 detainees had been held for greater than a year and several hundred have been held without trial since 2003. Concerning juvenile detainees, General Petraeus said their detention that was the issue, but the condition of their detention which was a concern. He urged PM Maliki to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross or other similarly recognized organization to inspect these facilities for the good of the Iraqi government and its reputation.

¶15. (S) PM Maliki responded that the Iraqi government had recently released 4,700 detainees and understood how these jails could easily become terrorist training camps. He said more releases would be possible. In fact, as jails became crowded, he said he instructed his ministers to release as many petty criminals as possible, holding only the most serious offenders or those dangerous/violent. He considered it a necessary step for reconciliation.

Golden Dome Rebuilding

¶17. (S) PM Maliki expressed concern about possible attacks on the Turkish company that is rebuilding the Golden Dome Mosque, due to a lack of security in Samarra. In an attempt to reassure the Prime Minister, MOD Qadr, reviewed the training plan of the Samarra brigade, discussed their equipment deliveries, and briefed the checkpoint plan to enhance the city,s security. MOI al-Bolani also noted that regional security forces were improving -- Salah ad Din police had recently captured 8 suicide bombers and over 2,000 people had signed up as concerned citizen volunteers in the Balad area. PM Maliki asked for periodic updates to the MCNS on the Samarra issue.

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